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Opportunities and Challenges of EFL Teachers and Students in the Gegharkunik Region.

A thesis submitted in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

Syuzanna Karapetyan

Irshat Madyarov, Adviser

Irena Galikyan, Reader

Yerevan, Armenia

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We hereby approve that this capstone

By

Syuzanna Karapetyan

Entitled

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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Irshat Madyarov, Adviser

Irshat Madyarov, Ph.D.

MA TEFL Program Chair

Yerevan, Armenia

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## Abstract

Action research has been widely used in various educational settings for a range of purposes. It is used in EFL classrooms to promote the level of education and bring educational changes and developments. The current study aims at finding out the English language teaching and learning needs of the teachers and the students and to address them with the help of creating a teacher community in the Gegharkunik region. Being one of the teachers in the same region and noticing the poor teaching and learning styles gave me the motivation to do this action research. Under the circumstances of Covid-19 almost all the universities went online which brought hardships and obstacles for both the teachers and the students. After several months of online teaching and learning, some parts of Armenia went face to face meetings and this study was conducted in a face-to-face setting.

The participants of this study were 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and three English teachers studying and teaching at a high school in the Gegharkunik region. This study is action research. The project is cyclical and not linear, including a researcher, three teachers and students. Both quantitative and qualitative data are incorporated in this study. The qualitative data was collected through pre and post interviews with the teachers and classroom observations. At the same time, quantitative data was gathered through pre and post-surveys with the students. The results of the study showed that the teacher community played an efficient role in teacher professional development and the students language learning proficiency development.

Keywords: challenges, opportunities, teaching materials, public school, possible solutions, teacher community.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The study aims at providing the English language teachers with innovative teaching resources through collaboration and developing the students English language skills. The action research in the EFL classroom is one of the most beneficial and meaningful research as it exposes various ways of students and teachers language learning and teaching developments. Teacher development plays a crucial role especially in schools. So, it is essential to promote the teachers to be teacher-as-learner (Mirke, Cakula, & Tzivian, 2009). Accordingly, the classroom action research is one of the critical development methods for promoting language teaching skills and the students' language learning abilities (Fedosejeva, Boce, Romanova, Ivanova & Ilisko, 2018; Heasly, Lindner, Ilisko, 2020; Impedovo & Ferreirs-Meyers, 2019; Piper, Veisson, & Salite, 2015; Rutherford & Lovern, 2018)

Although, the English language teaching is widely spread in the Gegharkunik region, the English teachers from Gavar city are not included in any teacher community. As a result, they lack innovative teaching resources and skills to use during the classes. To promote teacher professional development, action research is conducted with the help of creating a teacher community where the teachers can share the EFL challenges and try to find solutions to them in a collaboration. There is lack of teachers integration, students motivation and engagement and practical knowledge during the classes in a high school in the Gegharkunik region in the scope of English teachers. Consequently, the teachers lack innovative teaching resources and materials to be used during the classes and the students lack the engagement and the participation in the classes. On the purpose of finding a long-term solution to the target challenges, the present study

uses the action research to investigate the challenges inside the classroom and arm the teachers with more innovative and interactive teaching resources creating a teacher community.

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Even though English language teaching is widely spread in the Gegharkunik region, it still has challenges for both the students and the teachers. Being one of the teachers in the region and based on the anecdotal evidence from my teacher colleagues, there are no opportunities to develop teaching innovative methods and skills to apply in the classroom. Besides, teachers in Gavar city are not included in any teachers' community where they can share and discuss the challenges faced while teaching. The Grammar translation method is primarily used in the classrooms. Because of traditional ways of teaching, students lose motivation and engagement in classes. The project analyzes the challenges in English language teaching and learning in the Gegharkunik region and provides teachers with useful teaching resources and possible solutions to the language teaching and learning challenges and along the way creates a community where teachers can share resources and methods to develop students' language skills.

### **1.2 Purpose Statement**

The research aims at finding out the challenges and opportunities in the EFL classrooms in the Gegharkunik region for the purpose of professional teacher development. The study also aims at equipping English teachers with innovative language teaching methods and skills. Given the action research approach in this study, there is no research question.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **2.1 Action research in English language teaching and learning**

Action research is widely used in language teaching and learning, especially in developing countries, to help education flourish. Action research is the commonly used term for several research approaches which investigate a specific situation that brings a significant change and collaborative participation (Phakiti, 2015). Action research includes several terms such as participatory action research (PAR), critical action research (CAR), cooperative inquiry and participant inquiry. All these terms share standard features and purposes: (a) to analyze challenges and to come up with solutions and improvements (b) generate practical and theoretical knowledge about the situation (c) create a community where the members can collaborate (d) to enhance self-development and growth.

Action research is a systematic and often a cyclical approach that allows the researchers and other participants to collaborate to identify and overcome specific challenges in the EFL classrooms. According to Burns (1998), the purpose of the action research is to investigate the problematic situations in order to bring critically informed changes in practice. Action research is cyclical and not linear. There are several steps to follow while fulfilling this research. They are the following: planning which helps to understand what problem areas should be investigated, then acting, which includes the strategies and actions which will be used. Finally, observing and reporting which intend to understand the main data gathering techniques and find out what intended and unintended outcomes will be identified as a consequence (Phakiti, 2015).

This research is mainly used in EFL classrooms for enlarging the teachers' and the students' language teaching and learning skills and overcoming the challenges faced. Correspondingly, the teachers identify the issue while language teaching and explore it in

collaboration (Burns, 2010). According to Locke and Riley (2009), collaborative action research develops and enhances teachers' professional skills as there is a collaboration between the teachers, students, and researchers. This allows the teachers to acquire more innovative resources to solve the challenges faced in the EFL classrooms. Tasker, Johnson and Davies (2010) state that staff meetings and collaboration bring teachers together and allow them to think critically and reflectively, leading to finding out the possible solutions to the language teaching and learning challenges in the English language classrooms.

## **2.2 The challenges in language teaching and learning**

Learning and teaching a new language is a complex process as the challenges and factors affecting it are diverse. What is a second language and how do the students learn a second language? What are the challenges teachers and students face in the EFL classroom? Second language acquisition is learning any other language after the first language (Ellis, 2015). The first language acquisition influences it as it occurred after the L1 acquisition. Compared to the L1 when the children acquire the first language at their early two years, acquiring the second language is an ongoing and complex process that can occur at any age with different language learning challenges. Many L2 learners study the language in the context of the classroom. According to Ellis (2015), SLA refers to learning another language after the first language in the context of communication, while the “foreign” language acquisition commonly occurred under the circumstances of classroom settings and instructions. Yet, L2 acquisition is considered a term to include both. On the way to learning a second language, both the students and the teachers face many difficulties. Many scientists consider the students’ age, motivation, and physiological factors as challenges in the English language learning process (Ellis, 2015). Moreover,

according to Selinker (1972), the students' first language plays a relatively colossal role in second language learning.

Kallerman (1983) suggests that students' first language not only allows the students to learn the second language easily, but it also creates difficulties for them, preventing them from learning the second language for some reasons. Kallerman (1983) suggests a term called "language distance," which refers to the students whose first language is similar to their second language, Dutch and English. According to Kallerman (1983), these students tend to learn their second language easily and quickly, while students whose first language is very different from English, for example, Chinese and English, intend to learn English with difficulties and within a long time.

Besides, Ellis (2015) highlights the importance and influence of psychological factors in the English language learning process. Motivation, which is considered a psychological factor, is the main conative factor in developing the English language and has been of interest to many researchers in the language learning field. Dörnyei and Otto (1998) state the motivation in the EFL classroom is "a process" rather than "a state". It means motivation is a continuing process that allows the students to keep on the language learning process. According to Gardner (2001), motivation includes the learners' attitude toward the teacher and the instruction used in the classroom. Besides, motivation helps increase the students' willingness to learn a new language and promotes them to be more engaged in the classes. However, sometimes students get unmotivated. Macintyre, Baker, Clement, and Conrad (2001) suggest that the reason and effect of unmotivated students is the lack of interactive and innovative resources used by the teachers. According to Clement (1986), the students' self-confidence and motivation are closely interrelated during the EFL classes. The students get motivated when they notice them speaking

in the English language. Using both motivation and self-confidence allows the students to be more engaged in the EFL classroom (Clement, 1986). Besides, the presence of the students' peers raises the students' willingness and motivation to participate in the classes.

### **2.3 Opportunities and practices in language teaching and learning**

Opportunities and good practices in language learning and teaching have been of interest to many students, teachers and researchers. Many researchers suggest different practical theories and learning strategies to make English language learning more effective. So far, there is no fixed methodology or mode of both teaching and learning that can be used in all the cases.

Different language learning and teaching strategies come with regularities. According to Cohen and Chi (2001), there are various strategies in the English language learning process, such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. While O'Malley and Chamot (1990) distinguish that there are three main key strategies to learn the language: (a) metacognitive strategy which is planning to which aspect of language input to attend, (b) cognitive strategy such as "inferring or guessing the meaning of the new item" and (c) social or affective strategies which is "asking for the clarification" from the teacher or instructor. More researchers find the strategy instruction to be effective in the EFL classroom. Hassan et al. (2005) conducted an experiment of using the classroom's instructional strategies, which was found to be productive for developing the students' language skills.

A meta-analytic review of strategy instruction done by Plonsky (2011) provides comprehensive evidence for the effectiveness of using strategy-based instruction. The meta-analysis included 6,791 learners and 61 studies. According to Plonsky (2011), the students benefited from the instructional strategy as they could develop English language proficiency in a more organized and practical manner. Moreover, he found that instruction directed at cognitive

strategies was more effective than the instruction directed at metacognitive strategies. As a result, the effectiveness of the instructional strategy was obvious in the reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary and pronunciation, but comparably weak in grammar, listening or general proficiency (Plonsky, 2011). Besides the usefulness of the instructional strategy in the EFL classrooms, Dörnyei (2005) states that these language learning strategies cannot be applied for all the students respectively. Another reason is that the ways of language teaching and learning are changing within time which brings other challenges and new ways of overcoming them in the EFL classroom settings.

## **2.4 EFL in Armenia**

The notion of teacher development is one of the most investigated and discussed topics nowadays. According to Fitch & Pineda (2014), promoting teacher professional development means creating a new and skilled society. Teachers prepare the future generation by educating and transferring knowledge and skills and to some extent affecting students' careers and plans (Mirici, 2008). English teachers play a crucial role in many public schools and universities in Armenia as English is considered the second or the third language after Armenian. Besides, English language teaching and learning is widely spread in Armenia over the years. As a result of the high demand for English learning and teaching, English teachers need to take training programs or be involved in teacher communities to stay updated. As Putman (2014) states, teacher communities and teacher training should cooperate to reach excellence in teaching as the methods and the ways of English language teaching are changing currently.

In Armenia, the teachers are provided with regular training every five years. The National Institute of Education (NIE) offered the training and is sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Although the researchers do not well explore this field, the evidence

suggests that the teachers need constant professional development. Besides, some teachers from Armenian regions hardly participate in the events that aim to develop teachers' teaching methods for several reasons. Still, some cities and villages are included, but most do not have space where the English teachers can work on their development. As an alternative way of developing English teachers' teaching skills, teacher communities need to be created, for example, in the Gegharkunik region, Sevan city is included in the teacher community but other cities and villages are not. This brings many EFL challenges and obstacles. According to Tortop (2014), the teachers should be trained to work with multi-leveled and multi-aged students with innovative teaching materials and resources. Being from Gavar city and graduated from one of the schools there and based on my anecdotal evidence, most English teachers use Grammar-translation method in EFL classrooms. Mirici (2006) suggests that the English teachers should participate in the process of curricular design which will give them opportunities to collaborate and present new ideas and ways of English teaching. Besides, using well-organized materials and already experienced teaching methods affect learners by promoting and motivating students to study (Perry, 2003). Sometimes the students from Gavar city do not have achievements in language learning and abandon the idea of studying it. This occurred because of the outdated materials and the overused traditional techniques. Friedman (2014) states that 21st-century teachers need to be more flexible in choosing the teaching materials. Friedman (2014) suggests that besides using useful and new resources the lessons are to be more student-centered. This is considered to be another obstacle the English language teachers face in Gegharkunik while language teaching as they tend to make the lessons more teacher centered. According to Watkins (2007), the students excel in the language learning process if sufficient exposure is given to the language development activities. Zemelman (1998) asserts that each



student requires individual attention and teaching to achieve success in language learning. Teachers are helpers for the students who struggle during the English language learning process. In general, EFL research is slightly investigated in Armenia, especially in regions and much attention needs to be given to teacher professional development.

### **2.5 The effectiveness and productivity of English teacher community**

Many researchers state that having a teacher community plays a crucial role not only for the teachers but also for the students in the EFL classroom as it positively affects the process of language learning and teaching. Well-prepared teachers insist that collaboration between the teachers and the students leads to language teaching achievements in the EFL contexts. Moreover, they state that collaboration brings a community where the teachers constantly share the EFL challenges and try to overcome them using new resources as a key. Each time new challenges appear; the community collaborates and critically discusses the challenges of finding the appropriate solutions. The teachers collaboratively think about new innovative teaching methods using different resources to overcome already existing EFL challenges in the classroom. The teachers are free to express their suggestions according to the challenges they have noticed during the English language classes (Bryk, A., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. 2015). Teacher community gives them opportunities to collaborate over a specific time and try to use the already existing and newly created teaching methods in the classroom. Accordingly, four crucial dimensions of teachers participation in the community include: (a) having a common purpose and visions, (b) possessing a responsibility for analyzing and developing new ways of teaching in the EFL classrooms, (c) using the data which have been taken from the previous classes (d) using innovative and adopted activities during the classes to find out how they worked and what could be conducted the next step in the EFL classroom (Fulton, Doerr, &

Britton, 2010). These dimensions are experienced and tried by the universities, schools and language centers. The reflections of the experiments showed that the teacher community encourages the teachers to think deeply about what they have observed, analyzing both the weaknesses and strengths during the teaching in the classroom and come up with more innovative solutions to the challenges (Leatham & Peterson, 2010). Moreover, engaging the teachers outside the classroom setting is another possibility of developing and strengthening language teaching methods. Some examples may include meeting in nature, weekly visits to homes or meeting any other place to discuss and adopt the materials according to the students' needs. Also, meeting outside the classroom to create a community and do a lesson can be helpful not only for the teachers but also for the students. In this case, the students feel more comfortable in communicating with the teachers and their peers. To conclude, this literature review is closely interrelated with this study as it sheds light on the most discussed and key parts of the project including action research in EFL classrooms, challenges and opportunities in EFL, EFL in Armenia and teacher community. The existence of a teacher community is crucial in teacher professional development and growth to bring educational changes and achievements.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The study is action research aiming at finding out the language teaching and learning challenges and opportunities in the EFL classrooms of a high school in Gegharkunik. It aims to create a teacher community among the teachers and promotes the teacher professional development. The following chapter describes the educational setting of the study, the participants, the data collection and the procedure with the analysis.

### ***3.1 Research Design***

Within the framework of action research, this study was conducted with three EFL classes with 10th, 11th and 12th grade students and three English teachers. The research employed a mixed methods approach. The weight of qualitative and quantitative strands was equally included in the research. The study started from the qualitative data collection then shifted into quantitative data collection. The data was collected and analyzed separately according to the research strands. To make the study reliable and well-validated, data triangulation was implemented to gather information on the same question from different angles such as teacher interviews, student surveys, classroom observation. As this is action research with emergent research design where problems and solutions are identified with every next data collection and analysis step, instead of s research questions, this study is guided by a general goal: 1. to identify opportunities and challenges among EFL teachers and students in a high school in the Gegharkunik region, 2. to support the teacher participants in addressing the most pressing of the identified challenges.

### ***3.2 Educational Contexts, Participants and Materials***

The research was conducted in three EFL classrooms of a high school in Gegharkunik. The Gegharkunik region is in the Eastern part of Armenia. The Gegharkunik marz is divided into 57 municipal communities, from which the five are urban, including cities Gavar, Tchambarak,

Martuni, Sevan and Vardenis and the others are rural areas. The area of Gegharkunik is 5,349 km<sup>2</sup> and is considered to be the largest marz among the other provinces in Armenia. It has a population of 235.075, almost equally split between female and male citizens. Gegharkunik has borders with Tavush, Kotayk and Ararat Province from the West and Vayots Dzor province from the south. It has eastern borders with Azerbaijan. There are 126 public schools and two main post-secondary institutions: Gavar State University, Vasken's Theological Academy located at Sevan Peninsula (Dowsett, C. James Frank, 2021).

The table is below to give in detail information about this study. The identity of the participants, the location and school are not disclosed.

Table 1

*Information About Participants*

	Male students	Female students	Female Teachers
Class 1	11	14	1
Class 2	11	15	1
Class 3	10	14	1
Total	75		

The students were all native speakers of Armenian living in the Gegharkunik Province aged from 15-19. The teachers' age ranges from 35-50. The three teachers graduated from the Yerevan State Linguistic University faculty of "Foreign Language and Literature". The English language proficiency level of the students ranged from high elementary to low intermediate

according to the diagnostic test. The English classes for the students took place every day for 40 minutes. The lessons were based on the coursebooks respectively to their age groups. Only the textbooks called “English 10/ 11/ 12” written by Baghdasaryan, S., Gyurdzhyan S., (2017) were used during the classes. The grammar-translation method was used during the classes. The textbooks included short reading passages and grammar activities. There were no interactive resources and activities in the textbooks.

### ***3.3 Ethical Considerations***

Before conducting the study, approval was received from the director of the public school. The three teachers gave informed consent to participate in the research and the parents of the students gave oral assent to the participation of their children. The teachers' interviews were conducted individually. The teachers agreed on being recorded, considering that the recordings should be confidential and upon the completion of this project, the audio recorded data would be deleted and not sharable. The surveys were anonymous to protect the participants' privacy. As not all the students had computer accessibility, hard copies of surveys were given to the students. The teachers' time and workload were taken into consideration to avoid possible inconveniences with extra work.

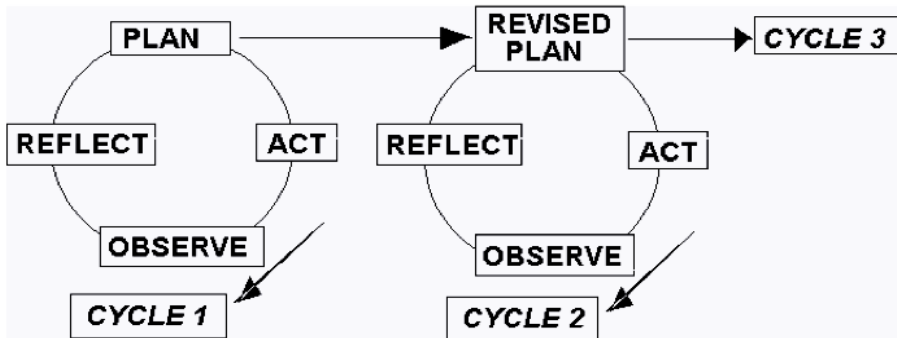
### ***3.4 Instruments and Procedure***

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for the study:

- classroom observations,
- textbook analysis,
- pre-study interview with the teachers,
- pre-study survey with students,
- post-study interview with the teachers,

- post-study survey with students.

The procedure of the project was cyclical following the steps demonstrated below



*Figure 1. Action Research Model (Car & Kemmis, 1986)*

Before administering, the thesis adviser made all the necessary changes and revised the surveys and the interview questions.

### ***3.4.1 Classroom Observation***

The observations were done in the EFL classrooms to determine what language teaching methods were used during the classes and the students' attitudes towards the teaching resources and materials. It also aimed at finding out the students' and teachers' language learning and teaching challenges in the EFL classrooms. At the beginning of the study, nine observations took place for the purpose of collecting data.

### ***3.4.2 Textbook Analysis.***

The textbook was analyzed qualitatively in terms of the nature of the activities. The main criterion was whether the tasks and exercises included interactive and engaging activities. The analysis identified reading and answering the questions in each unit. The units also had vocabulary specific to the reading texts but they lacked any interactive activities which could create opportunities for the teachers to use to engage the students in the classes.

### ***3.4.3 Pre-study and Post-study Interviews.***

Before the study, interviews were conducted with the three English teachers. The pre-study interviews aimed at finding the challenges the teachers faced in the EFL classrooms. It also aimed at finding out the materials and teaching methods applied during the classes. The interview also investigated whether the teachers collaborated when they met language teaching challenges in the EFL classrooms (see Appendix A).

The post-study interviews were conducted with the teachers to determine the effectiveness of the teacher community in the EFL classroom and to what extent they needed a teacher community inside the school. Moreover, the interview intended to find out how practical and efficient would the implementation of new teaching materials be in the EFL classrooms according to the teachers (see Appendix B).

### ***3.4.4 Pre-study and Post-study Surveys.***

At the beginning of the study, the students completed a survey including multiple choice and open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The surveys were conducted both in English and Armenian, considering that some students may find it difficult to answer the questions in English. This allowed them to express their ideas in their mother tongue freely.

The pre-study survey aimed to determine the students' attitude toward the language learning process and distinguish the main challenges they faced in the EFL classroom. For data triangulation, the survey included questions on the frequency of using interactive resources during the learning process.

The post-study aimed at revealing the students' attitude towards the innovative teaching resources applied during this project. It also aimed at finding out the changes in their motivation to study and to what extent it has changed. Moreover, the post-study aimed at finding out what activities the students would like to have during this project (see Appendix D).

### ***3.5 Data analysis***

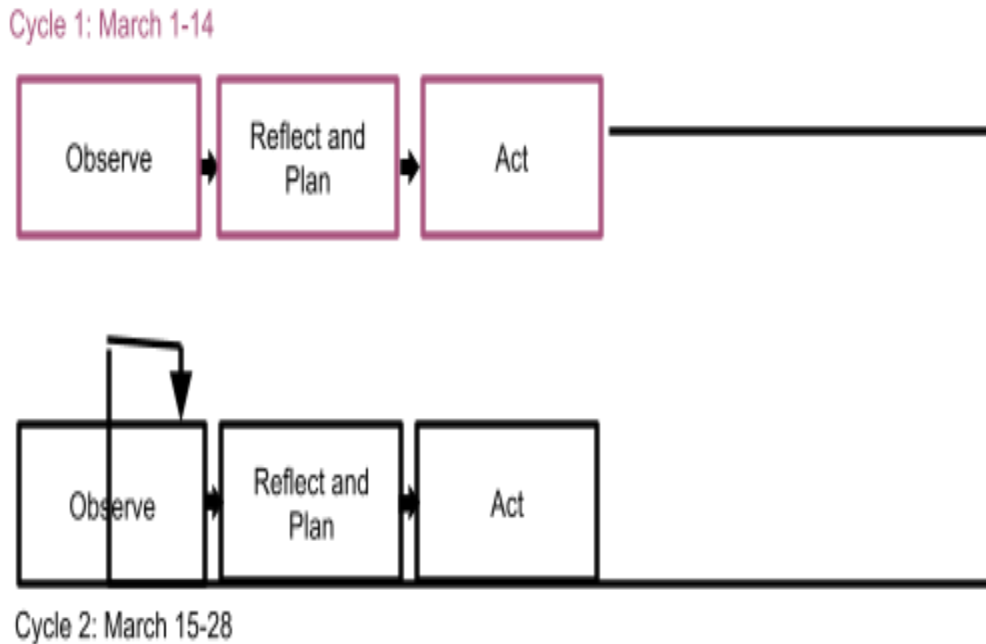
The quantitative data obtained from the surveys was analyzed with a statistical analysis tool called Excel while the qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed inductively, including open-ended survey questions. The post-study survey's open-ended questions were revised inductively combined into themes and presented cohesively. Because of the cyclical nature of the methodology, the interviews were analyzed first, then the pre-surveys with the students were followed.



## *CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS*

The current study was conducted to determine the English language teaching and learning challenges and opportunities in EFL classrooms with the help of the teacher community among the teachers teaching at a school in Gegharkunik. Equally important is determining the English language teachers' teaching needs and addressing them with the help of collaboration. Thus, based on the findings revealed by the research instruments, the upcoming section of this study demonstrates the answers to the guiding purpose of the statement. The teacher community was formed around the data provided from pre-interview, pre-survey results and in-class observations.

The study included two cycles. Each cycle lasted for two weeks. The table demonstrated the cycles and their terms conducted during the project. The first cycle had a direct impact on what was observed and planned in the second cycle.



*Figure 2.* The two cycles and their terms.

***Cycle 1: Observe***

Class observations, pre-interview and pre-survey were included in the first cycle.

According to the interview results and in-class observations, the teachers had overlapping EFL challenges:

- lack of innovative resources / fix syllabus.

Grammar-translation method was used in EFL classrooms. The teachers used only the textbooks. As the teachers mentioned, there was a fixed syllabus they followed.

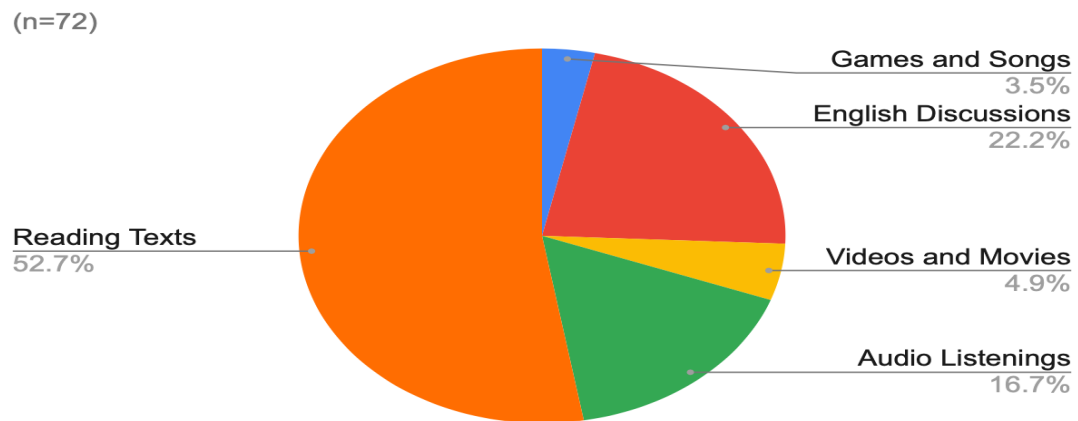
- unmotivated students / large number of students.

The teachers considered the large number of the students and the lack of teaching resources as a reason for having unmotivated students.

Unique EFL challenges specific to the teachers included:

- administration work
- classroom noise
- time constraints

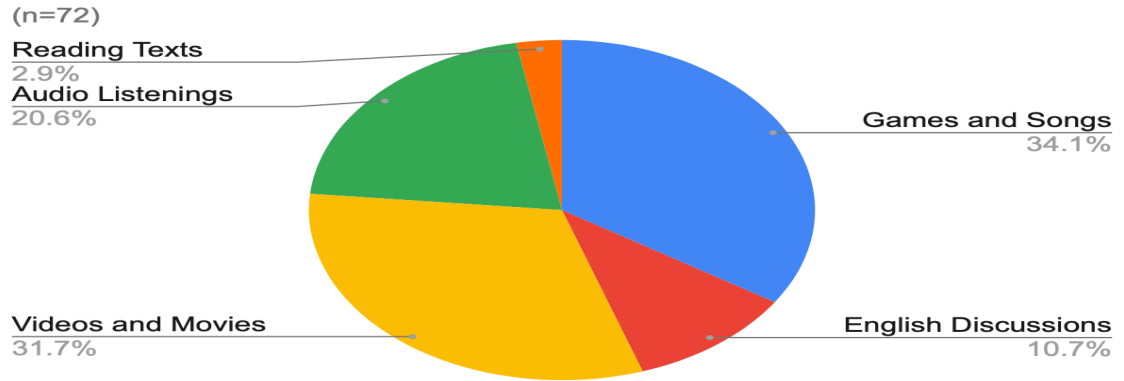
The pre-surveys were conducted with the students to determine the language learning challenges they face. The data were analyzed quantitatively using Excel. The respondents were able to choose several items from the survey question. The chart below shows the result of the data from the surveys.



*Figure 3. Frequently used activities during the classes in the EFL classrooms.*

According to the survey results, it was found that reading and translating texts composed the biggest part of the language learning process. Moreover, most of the students mentioned that they repetitively do the same format of exercises on different topics. 52.7% of the students claimed that they usually do reading and translating the texts which composed the class's whole time and did not do any activities besides it. As a result of not using innovative activities, the students lost motivation and engagement in the classes, making the classes noisier and less productive.

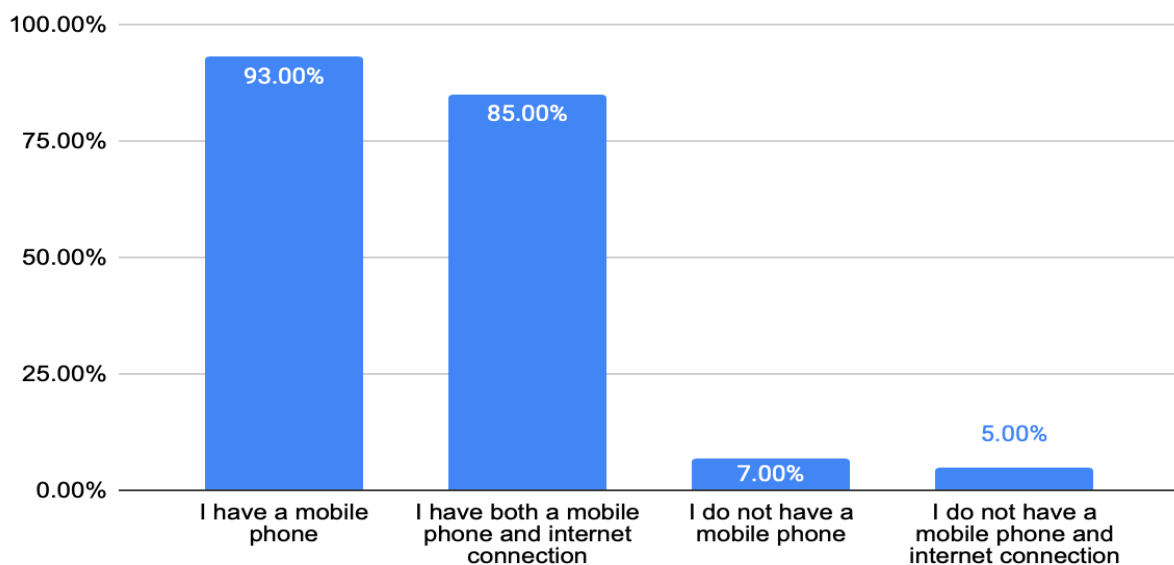
The result of the next survey question is demonstrated below.



*Figure 4.* The activities the students wished to be added to the English language learning process.

According to the chart, only 2.9 % of the students choose to include reading texts to the language learning process, which stands for a good reason to include games, songs, videos or movies as interactive activities to learn the English language.

The purpose of the next question was to find out whether the students possessed mobile phones or not and if yes, did they have internet access to them?



n= 72

*Figure 5. Mobile phone and internet accessibility*

The results showed that almost all the students possessed mobile phones and internet access, which was an opportunity for the teachers and the researchers to include online activities. Besides, it was found out that the school administration allowed printing and using microphones which was another opportunity for including more activities.

According to the interview and survey results both the students and the teachers mentioned that the textbooks used do not include interactive activities and they are not context-responsive. Besides, the teachers noted that the textbook materials promoted lower order thinking skills and the students got bored with the activities. Both the students and the teachers agreed that the textbooks did not match the students' needs and expectations. Because of the observations, interviews with the teachers and the surveys with the students it was planned to adopt the materials from the textbooks and add new interactive activities within collaboration.

***Cycle 1: Reflect and Plan***

As a result of the interview and survey, it was decided to focus on the students' motivation. Engaging activities were suggested and collaboratively discussed by the teachers and the researcher. Finding, adopting or offering innovative activities were time-consuming. As a result of collaborative work, songs and games were included in the teaching materials, such as the "Kahoot" game and the "Lenka" song. The game included the vocabulary the students had already learned and the song was aimed to entertain and at the same time include listening activity to the class. Both the song and the game were chosen to promote the students' engagement and motivation during the classes. Additional materials and resources were shared and provided during the reflecting and planning stage (see Appendixes E, F).

***Cycle 1: Act***

During the implementation stage, co-teaching was done by the researcher and the teacher. The songs helped the students reduce their anxiety during the classes and be more self-confident, allowing the teachers to interact with all the students easily. The game allowed the students to get engaged in the first moments of playing it. All the words and expressions included in the game were taken from their textbooks. As a result of the implementation of the first cycle, the students got motivated and the teachers had more skills and interesting resources to use in language teaching.

After the end of one of the classes, a student confessed: “I really enjoyed today’s class, as it was funny and interesting for me.” The first cycle showed that the usage of songs and games positively affected increasing the students’ engagement and motivation to the classes.

### ***Cycle 2: Observe***

As a result of observing the class during the acting stage, it was found out that although using fun and interactive activities, some students were still very quiet and did not want to participate in classes. Later, it was found out that the classrooms include orphan students who did not have any participation during the classes. Also, the orphan students did not communicate with other students. Moreover, as a result of using songs and games, the classrooms became noisy, creating obstacles for the teachers.

### ***Cycle 2: Reflect and Plan***

The three teachers and the researcher worked in collaboration. As a result of collaboration, group work activities were chosen to integrate the orphan students into the classes and reduce classroom noise. It was decided to include group work activities and to make small groups to make sure all the members of the group participated. This was done to include all the students in the class and reduce the classroom noise. The group work included writing and

speaking activities. The writing activities included gap-filing, multiple-choice activities on articles, tenses, reordering the words to make a sentence (see Appendix G). The speaking activities were describing the picture or answering the open-ended questions (see Appendix H).

### ***Cycle 2: Act***

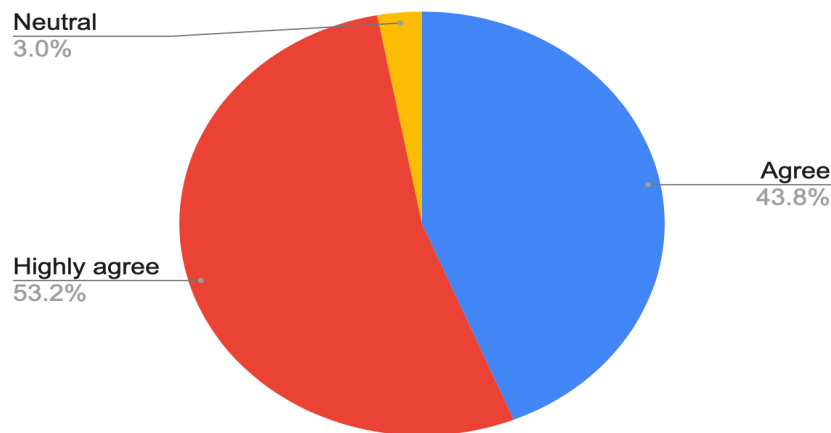
As a result of using group work activities, all the students participated in the classes. The teacher helped and promoted the students' integration by asking questions or explaining anything the students needed. As all the students were integrated in small groups, it created chances for each of them to speak, communicate and have a participation. As a result of the second cycle, all the students participated in the activities and class. Moreover, the classroom noise was reduced with the help of using group work activities. After the second cycle, several observations were done to see the consistency of using innovative teaching resources. As a result, it was found out that the teachers successfully used the materials shared during the meetings between them and the researcher. The teachers used different online tools and activities in their teaching process, including "Wheel to decide," "Kahoot," "Quiz," "Two truths and a lie" and so on.

At the end of the project, post-interview and post-survey were conducted with the teachers and the students. The interviews aimed to find out the teachers' attitude about the teacher community. One of the teachers mentioned: "As a result of this project not only the students but also we had many opportunities to change our way of teaching and acquire new skills." Another teacher asserts that this project helped her identify the students' language learning needs and the teacher community promoted her to address the needs in collaboration. According to the teacher interview results, the teachers achievements included:

- ability to slightly develop the students' language skills through new and innovative teaching materials

- ability to analyze the teaching and learning challenges and address them in the collaboration.
- new innovative teaching resources

As a result of the student post-surveys, it was found out that most of the students enjoyed the new innovative teaching resources.



*Figure 6.* I like the new way of learning.

According to the chart, 53.2 % of the students highly agreed that the new way of teaching and learning was enjoyable to them, 43.8 % of the students agreed with the statement and only 3 % of the students gave a neutral answer. As the chart implies and based on the findings, the students enjoyed the classes.

To sum up, the teachers were developed professionally as each of them acknowledged that they experienced different degrees of personal development as well. They stated that they could find the teaching and learning gaps and try to address them by the help of collaboration within the framework of action research. The teachers could develop professionally as a result of working together on specific issues and challenges determined during the cycles. The teachers could find specific solutions to the challenges including the use of songs and games for



increasing the students' engagement in the classes or doing group works and activities as a solution to reduce noise in the classroom. As the teachers noted, they developed not only as professional teachers but also acquired other skills as well including being more flexible during the classes and not being fixed on the textbook during all the classes.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study aimed at investigating the language teaching needs of the English teachers of a high school of Gegharkunik and to address them. The following chapter seeks to reflect on and connect the research findings with the literature. In response to the first cycle, specific challenges were identified, including a lack of teaching resources and unmotivated students. As a result of the first cycle, interactive activities were added to the teaching resources, making the classes more student-centered and interesting; some of the students got motivated and engaged in the classes. As a result of songs and games, the classrooms became noisy. During the second cycle, the focus was on integrating the orphan students into the classes and reducing classroom noise. As a result of using group work activities which included speaking and writing tasks, all the students got engaged. The classroom became less noisy.

The results showed that the teacher community had an essential impact on teacher professional development and provided the teachers with the innovative teaching resources and skills which stand for solutions to the language teaching challenge they face in the EFL classrooms. According to the teachers, the teacher community developed their teaching skills as they had opportunities to share and discuss specific challenges and address them. Moreover, the teachers mentioned that they became “researchers” in their classrooms which gave them abilities

to observe, analyze and address the needs of the students. As Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) state, the teacher community is an effective solution to many teaching challenges in EFL classrooms. It identifies the need of the teachers and explores the language teaching and learning challenges.

Ratnawati and Idris (2020) state that a teacher community is a helpful solution between theory and practice and promotes the development in teaching and learning. As a result of the teacher community among the researcher and the teachers, new teaching resources were shared for the specific challenge observed during the classes. The teacher community promoted the development of language teaching skills. According to Meesuk, Sramoon's, Wongrugs'a (2020) research, some EFL classrooms' challenges are the lack of students' motivation and engagement. As a solution to the challenge Wongrugs'a (2020) suggests adding new teaching resources which will create new opportunities for both the teachers and the students in their language learning and teaching development. As an effect of using innovative activities, the students got motivated and engaged during the classes, which brought visible insight into the language learning improvements. As Grisson and McQueen, Farmer, Ronfeldt (2015) suggest that when the teachers collaborate, their students benefit from it.

Similarly, Gutierrez and Kim (2018) claim that the existence of a teacher community promotes the improvement of teaching skills and maximizes the language teaching and learning developments of both the teachers and the learners. The study showed the same results. As the three mentioned and stated, the teacher community had an inseparable effect on their

professional development and growth. Consequently, both the teachers and the students have perceived the positive impact of the teacher community in the EFL classrooms.

### ***5.1 Pedagogical Implications***

The results provided several implications to make the teacher community more effective for both the students and especially for the teacher professional development.

The first recommendation for the teachers is to keep consistency during the implementation of the cycles and follow already prepared lesson plans. Sometimes the teachers stopped following the lesson plans and the materials included, which created some unexpected obstacles.

The second recommendation is to organize meetings with students and teachers outside of the school to create a friendly atmosphere for students. It will help the teachers understand the students' language learning challenges and needs and the students and orphan students. Meeting outside of the classroom will reduce anxiety and stress and create good opportunities for the teachers and the students to speak and interact.

The third recommendation is to include warm-up and wrap-up activities, allowing students to be engaged in the classes. Some warm-up, wrap-up beneficial activities are "Bingo," "Two truths and a lie," "Three things in common," and so on. However, some of these activities may lead to classroom noise. It is recommended to work in groups or pairs to reduce noise.

The fourth recommendation is to work on the project as a team. This leads to active collaboration and iteration among the teachers. Having one purpose helps the teachers to concentrate on the specific task and work collaboratively.

Finally, the teachers need to make the classes more student-centered rather than teacher-centered to avoid possible adverse outcomes. As it was mentioned that the students were comparably more engaged and motivated in the classes if more attention was given to them.

### ***5.2 Limitations and Delimitations of the study.***

There were several limitations and delimitations while conducting this study. Time constraint was the first limitation of the study. Collecting data and analyzing it took several weeks. Still, if there was an opportunity to have more time, it would be possible to include more participants and several schools from the province. Moreover, the age of the participants, English language proficiency, city and educational settings were among the delimitations of the study. Another thing to mention was the impossibility of interviewing all the students as the number of the students was comparably large.

### ***5.3 Recommendations for Further Research***

Helpful and positive findings were determined as a result of the project. The results shed light on more research statements and questions. Furthermore, the study highlights future research that could also explore teaching specific language skills through collaboration. The teachers will benefit from the collaboration and teach innovative resources for all the skills, including reading, speaking, listening and writing. Another recommendation is to use the action research in the EFL classroom for the long term to find out more challenges and outcomes. Under the chance of doing action research in the long term, the new challenges will appear to probe new solutions. Also, including more schools from the Gegharkunik province would provide more insights into the teachers' needs and ensure more opportunities to find solutions for addressing them. Including more schools, the teachers will change and adapt the teaching

materials and more students will find them engaging and motivating in the language learning process.

#### ***5.4 Conclusion***

The study results revealed that the teacher community was an efficient tool for developing teacher professional development and the students' language skills. The findings suggested that the teacher community can be practical for applying for different public schools in the Gegharkunik province. Using the teacher community in the EFL classrooms gave opportunities for the teachers to discover and co-construct new language learning and teaching skills. The teachers were armed with innovative language teaching materials and skills, leading to student engagement. It was found out that the teacher professional development positively impacted the students as they started to participate in the classes, and their motivation increased as a result of using innovative teaching resources based on the needs of the teachers and the students. To summarize, the teacher and the students are interrelated inside the school and the teacher's professional development had an efficient role in the students' language learning process. The teacher community positively influenced teacher professional development and student engagement in the classes.

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## Appendix A

### Pre-study Teacher Interview

I study at the American University of Armenia, and I am doing my thesis on the challenges and the best practices in the EFL classroom in Gegharkunik. I would like to ask you several questions regarding the challenges you face during English language classes and how you overcame them. The information will serve for educational purposes only. Your name will remain confidential. Participation is voluntary.

1. How long have you been teaching and what grade levels have you been teaching?  
What materials do you use while teaching?

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2. Under the circumstances of Covid-19 all of us overcame hardships especially in education. What challenges did you have in teaching online?

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3. What challenges do you have now under the conditions of face-to-face teaching?  
Do you prefer online or face to face teaching? Why?

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4. What do you think are the challenges for students in face to face learning ?

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5. Do you discuss the challenges with your colleagues for the purpose of finding possible solutions to the challenges?

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6. How do you overcome the current challenges while teaching?

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7. How do you keep your students motivated and engaged in classes?

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8. If you had an opportunity to solve any three challenges in your teaching career what would you change?

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9. Would you like to be a part of the teacher community through Armenia?

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10. If yes, what would you like to learn from the community?

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## Appendix B

### Post-study interview with the teachers

*Dear teacher. I really appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. Thank you for your time, efforts and great desire to help your students. I would like to ask you several questions regarding the teacher community if you do not mind.*

1. What are the effects of the teacher community on your professional development?

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2. What do you think the impact of the teacher community on the student language proficiency development?

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3. Could you identify which tool you will use for further teaching?

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4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the teacher community among the teachers?

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5. What challenges did you encounter during the process of collaborative work?

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6. Will you advise other teachers to use the teacher community as a way to identify the teachers and the students needed and to address them? Why?

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7. Do you have additional comments, suggestions that would make the teacher community more effective in the English classroom?

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## Appendix C

### Pre-study Student Survey

The aim of this survey is to learn about the challenges you face during English language learning. It also aims at finding out what changes you would like to have in English language learning process. The survey is anonymous. Do not write your name.

Այս հարցման նպատակն է իմանալ թե ինչ խնդիրների ես հանդիպում անգլերեն սովորելիս և ինչպես ես հաղթահարում դժվարությունները: Հարցման մյուս նպատակն է պարզել, թե ինչ նյութեր կցանկանաս տեսնել դասերի ընթացքում, որոնք կօգնեն ավելի հեշտ և արագ սովորել լեզուն: Հարցումը անանուն է: Մի՛ գրիր անունդ:

1. How many years have you been learning English?

Քանի՞ տարի ես անգլերեն սովորում:

- Less than 1 year / գրեթե մեկ տարի
- 1-3 years / 1-3 տարի
- 3-8 years / 3-8 տարի
- Other / այլ

2. What motivates you to study English?

Ի՞նչն է քեզ դրդում/ մոտիվացնում, որ սովորես անգլերենը:

- My future goals / Նպատակներս
- Fluency in English / Անգլերենին վարժ տիրապետելը
- My mid-term and entrance exams / Ընթացիկ և ավարտական քննությունները:
- Other /Այլ

3. Do you have a telephone? If yes, do you have access to the Internet?



Արդյո՞ք ունես բջջային հեռախոս: Համացանցը հասանալելի է՞ այն հեռախոսին, որը օգտագործում ես:

- I do not have telephone / Ես չունեմ հեռախոս
- I do have neither telephone nor Internet / Ես չունեմ ոչ հեռախոս, ոչ համացանցի

հնարավորություն

- I have a telephone/ Ես ունեմ հեռախոս
- I have both a telephone and Internet access / Ես ունեմ և հեռախոս, և համացանցի

հնարավորություն

4. What motivates you to study English?

Ի՞նչն է քեզ դրդում/ մոտիվացնում, որ սովորես անգլերենը:

- My future goals / Նպատակներս
- Fluency in English / Անգլերենին վարժ տիրապետելը
- My mid-term and entrance exams / Ընթացիկ և ավարտական քննությունները:
- Other /Այլ

5. What challenges do you meet while learning English?

Ի՞նչ խոչընդոտների ես հանդիպում անգլերեն սովորելիս :

- I sometimes feel unmotivated to study/ Ես երբեմն կորցնում եմ մոտիվացյան անգլերեն

սովորելու նկատմամբ

- I do not have enough time to study English / Ես բավականաչափ ժամանակ չունեմ

անգլերեն սովորելու համար

- I would like to have more interactive classes / Ես կցանկանայի, որ դասերը ավելի

հետադարձ լինեին

- Other / Այլ

6. How do you overcome the challenges you face during the language learning process? Write your answer below.

Ինչպե՞ս ես հաղթահարում այն խոչընդոտները որոնց հանդիպում ես լեզու սովորելիս:

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7. Which of the following do you frequently use to learn English during the classes?

Որպես անգլերենի զարգացման միջոց ո՞րն եմ հաճախակի օգտագործում դասերի ընթացքում:

- Texts for reading / Տեքստեր
- Audio listenings / Աուդիո լսումներ
- Videos and movies / Տեսանյութեր և ֆիլմեր
- Games and songs / Խաղեր և երգեր
- Discussions / Անգլերեն ֆննարկումներ
- All the above mentioned / Բոլոր նշվածները
- None of the above mentioned / Նշվածներից ոչ մեկը

8. Which of the following you would like to include in your language learning process?

Նշվածներից ո՞րը կցանկանաք ներառել դասերի ընթացքում:

- Texts for reading / Տեքստեր
- Audio listenings / Աուդիո լսումներ
- Videos and movies / Տեսանյութեր և ֆիլմեր
- Games and songs / Խաղեր և երգեր
- Discussions / Անգլերեն ֆննարկումներ
- All the above mentioned / Բոլոր նշվածները

Thank you!

Շնորհակալություն

#### *Appendix D*

Post-study survey question.

Dear students thank you for your efforts. I kindly ask you to answer the following questions.

Սիրելի ուսուցիչներ, շնորհակալություն եմ հայտնում ձեր ներդրած ջանքերի համար: Խնդրում եմ պատասխանել հետևյալ հարցերին:

1. I like the new teaching methods and resources applied during these weeks.

Ես հավանում եմ այս մի քանի շաբաթների ընթացքում կատարված ուսուցման նորարարակն մեթոդները:

- Strongly agree/Լիովին համաձայն եմ
- Agree/Համաձայն եմ
- Neither agree nor disagree/Չեզոք
- Disagree/Համաձայն չեմ
- Strongly disagree/Բացարձակ համաձայն չեմ

2. Which of the following do you consider helpful and interesting tools to use during the classes?

Նշվածներից ո՞րն ես համարում շատ օգտակար միջոց, որը կարելի է կիրառել սովորելիս:

- Texts for reading / Տեքստեր
- Audio listenings / Աուդիո լսումներ
- Videos and movies / Տեսանյութեր և ֆիլմեր
- Games and songs / Խաղեր և երգեր
- Discussions / Անգլերեն բնակարկումներ
- All the above mentioned / Բոլոր նշվածները
- None of the above mentioned / Նշվածներից ոչ մեկը

3. What are your outcomes from these weeks as a result of using new resources in the language learning process?

Ի՞նչ ձեռքբերումներ ունես այն ընթացքում, երբ նորարարական մեթոդներ և նյութեր են օգտագործվել:

---

4. I enjoyed the new way of teaching and learning.

Ես համոզվով էի սովորում:

- Strongly agree/Լիովին համաձայն եմ
- Agree/Համաձայն եմ
- Neither agree nor disagree/Չեզոք
- Disagree/Համաձայն չեմ
- Strongly disagree/Բացարձակ համաձայն չեմ

Thank you!

Շնորհակալություն

Appendix E

The worksheet of the song “Lenka”

# *Lenka – Everything At Once*

As sly as a fox, as strong as an ox  
As fast as a hare, as \_\_\_\_\_ as a bear  
As \_\_\_\_\_ as a bird, as neat as a word  
As quiet as a mouse, as \_\_\_\_\_ as a house

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
All I wanna be is everything

As mean as a wolf, as \_\_\_\_\_ as a tooth  
As deep as a bite, as \_\_\_\_\_ as the night  
As \_\_\_\_\_ as a song, as right as a wrong  
As long as a road, as \_\_\_\_\_ as a toad

As \_\_\_\_\_ as a picture hanging from a fixture  
\_\_\_\_\_ like a family, strong as I wanna be  
Bright as day, as light as play  
As \_\_\_\_\_ as nails, as grand as a whale

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
All I wanna be is everything

As \_\_\_\_\_ as the sun, as silly as fun  
As cool as a tree, as scary as the sea  
As hot as fire, \_\_\_\_\_ as ice  
Sweet as sugar and everything nice

As \_\_\_\_\_ as time, as straight as a line  
As royal as a queen, as buzzed as a bee  
Stealth as a tiger, smooth as a glider  
Pure as a melody, pure as I wanna be

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
All I wanna be is everything at once

## Appendix F

A part from the game “Kahoot” taken from one of the classes.

5 - Quiz

**Took**



Վերցրեց



Ժպտաց



Երգեց



Խոսեց

## Appendix G

Gap-filling and reordering the words activities taken from one of the classes.

11. I wondered what time .....

was the show starting

was starting the show

the show was starting

**A** First who stood in the class in first term?

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**B** Who stood first in class in the first term?

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**C** Who in stood first in the first term class?

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**D** In class in the first term who stood first?

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Appendix H

An example of the “Picture description” activity from the classes.



